

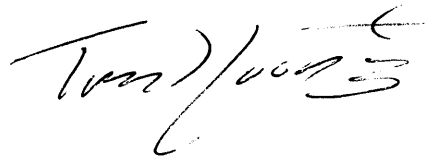
Murray at the Metropolitan

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Koontz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Abstract

My primary goal in creating "Murray at the Metropolitan" was to introduce various artistic concepts, processes, and specific works of art to a youthful audience in a fun, unique manner. By including both text and illustrations, I made this story accessible to children too young to read but engaged by picture books as well as elementary school-aged readers. "Murray..." is a book children can either read themselves or have read to them.

Throughout the course of this project I steadily reshaped and revised my original ideas, breaking down complex language into words and sentences fit for an audience of four- to nine-year olds. I was also challenged to create original illustrations using prints from the text The Metropolitan Museum of Art as models for my own free-hand images. Once the illustrations and text were completed, I utilized Adobe Photoshop to lay the wording around the illustrations.

The storyline follows the adventures of one imaginative seven-year-old boy named Murray on his class field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Murray's teacher inspires him with the idea that art should be experienced imaginatively. As he encounters various works of art that interest him, Murray finds himself able to interact with the artwork in different ways. For example, several human sculptures come to life and explain their stories. Murray is also able to blink himself into several paintings and interact with their subjects.

I chose a broad spectrum of artwork ranging from such ancient pieces as a medieval suit of armor to such iconic pieces as a Monet landscape. I wanted to include works that children could see at a young age and be able to remember and recognize when older. The task was to make these works of art interesting for an audience that has never heard of Impressionism or Realism. Murray became my vehicle to accomplish just that. He does not bother to investigate the names or backgrounds of the works of art. Like any kid, he simply explores the unknown through sensory interaction. Murray's faith makes possible the whole story, and through that I hope to encourage readers to trust in their imaginations as well, to let go of logic and doubt and simply enjoy following where their imaginations lead them. Through Murray's actions, I also hope to communicate to children that art is not just for grown-ups; it can be understood and appreciated in whatever ways they choose to experience it.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks go to Dr. Tom Koontz, who took time out of a very stressful year to lend his guidance and support to this project. Dr. Koontz initially exposed me to the craft of writing for young readers and encouraged me to pursue that interest down this specific path. I also want to thank Meghan Songer for her technical input, without which my text and illustrations would never have made it onto the page together.

Work Cited

Hibbard, Howard. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980.

MURRAY



AT THE

METROPOLITAN

A Story
by
Melissa Gleason

Murray at the Metropolitan

Story and Illustrations
by
Melissa Gleason

This is Murray.

Today his class went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Their teacher, Miss Lewis, said, "Art is about imagination. So look around, keep your eyes and ears open, and see where imagination takes you."

Murray liked the sound of that. As they began walking through the museum, he opened his eyes as wide as they would go.



Miss Lewis led the children into a room filled with statues.
Some of them sat in glass cases while others did not.
Murray walked up to one statue not much bigger than him.
It was a barefoot lady with black hair and a colorful dress.
She was holding a basket on top of her head.
Murray stared up at the basket, wondering what was inside it.
Suddenly, the statue looked right at him.
"Hello, little boy," she said pleasantly.
Murray jumped. "Are you a real person?" he whispered.
"No, I am a sculpture made out of wood," she answered.

Murray looked around. No one else seemed to be listening.

"Do you talk to everyone?" he asked.

"Only to very special people who I know will keep it a secret." Then she added, "Can you keep a secret?"

Murray nodded.

"Many of us sculptures will talk."

Murray's eyes widened.

"What about the pictures on the walls?" he asked.

The statue said, "Some will, some won't. Just try and see."

Just then, Miss Lewis announced, "Children, it is time to move on."

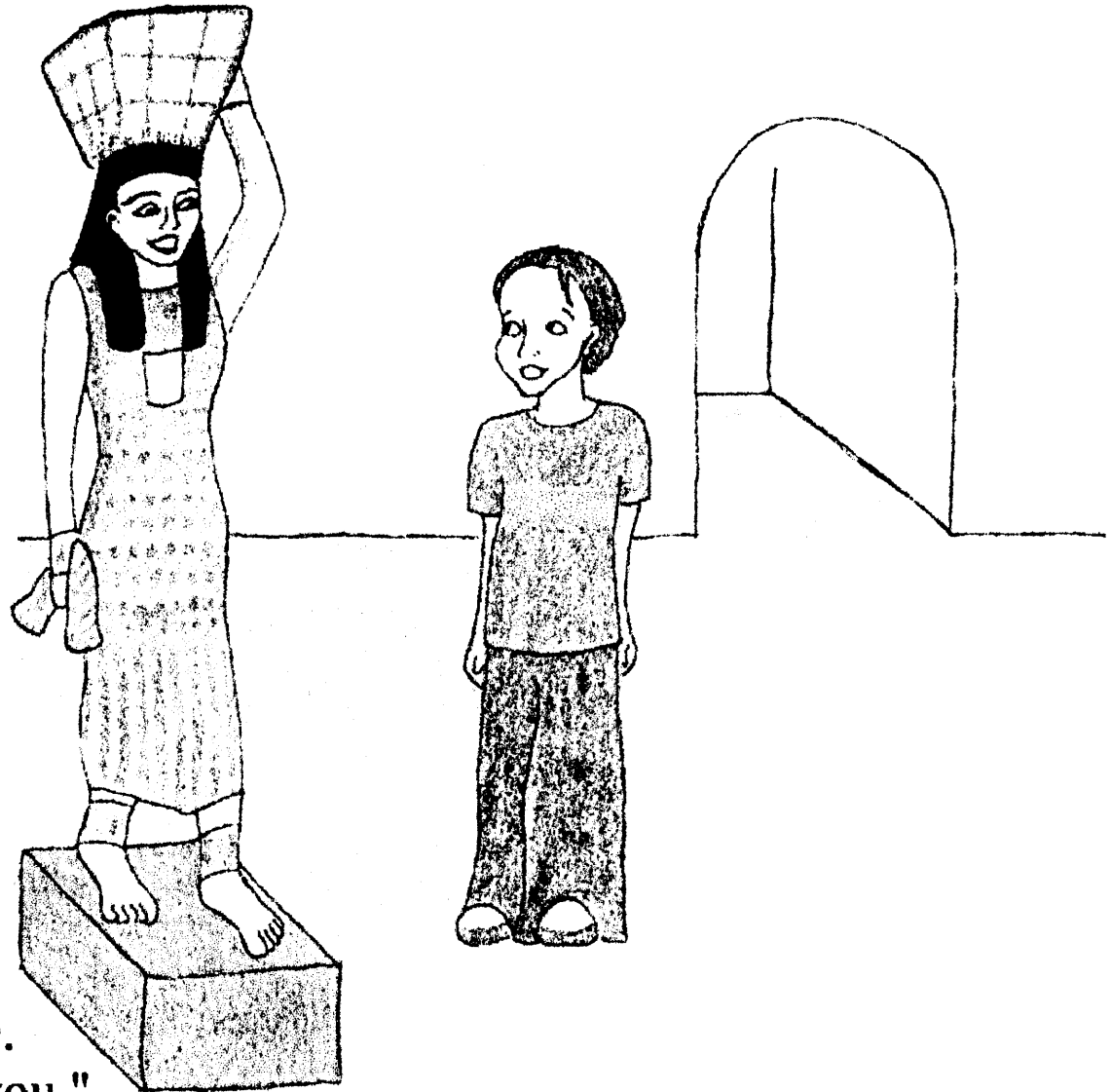
Murray looked at the statue.

"Well, it was nice to meet you,"

he said. She winked at him and then

stared straight ahead. Murray followed his class

out of the room. He could not wait to find out more.



The next room contained more glass cases with plates, vases, and drinking jugs inside them. Murray walked up to one case and stared hard at the vase. Its picture showed five men running in place.

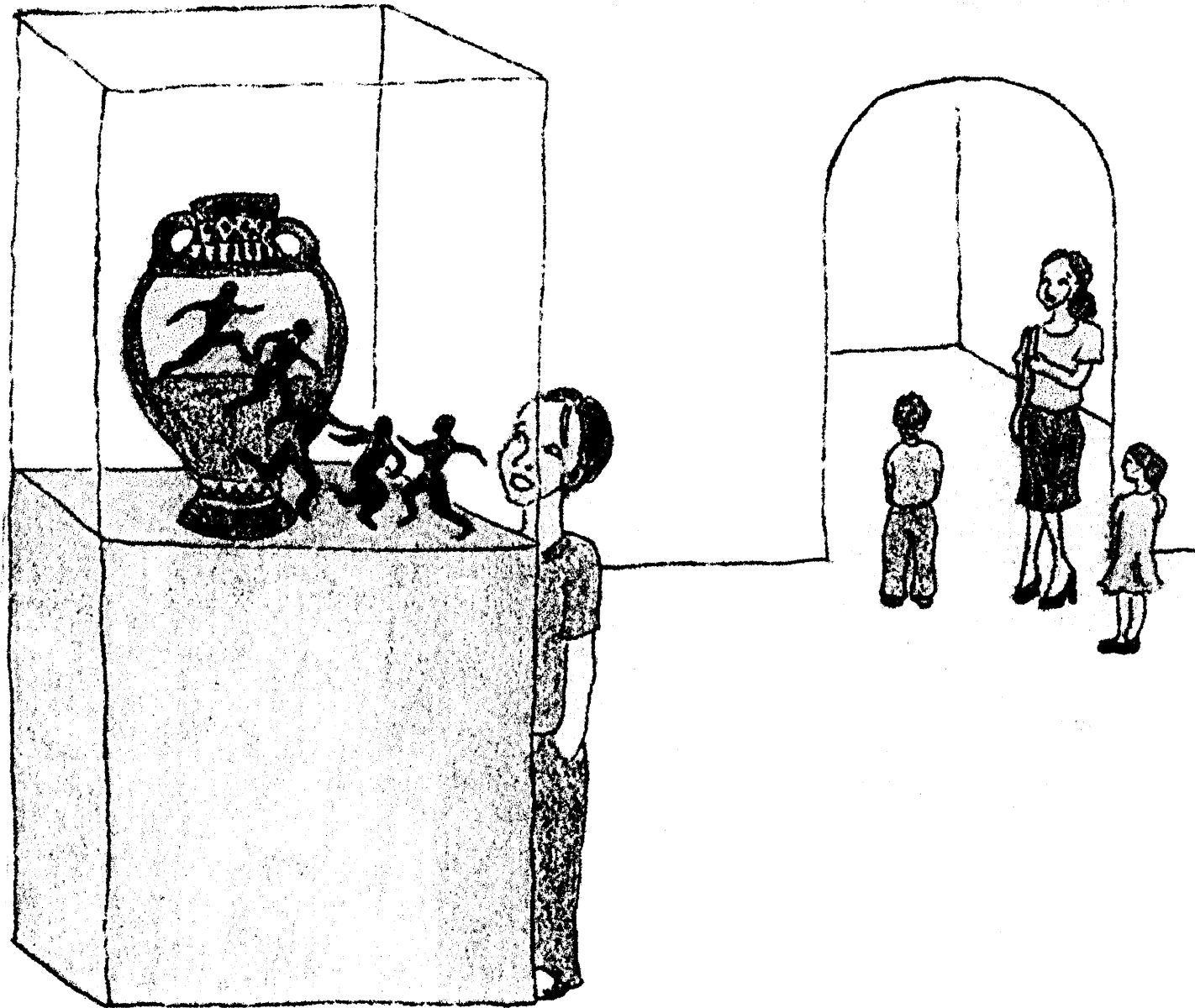
Suddenly, one by one, the men jumped down off the vase and began running around the inside of the case. As they passed under Murray's nose, he heard a tiny voice shout, "Come on, men! Keep up the pace!"

"What are you doing?" Murray asked them eagerly.

"Laps," puffed one of the men.

"We do 'em every day. Got to keep in shape." And the men disappeared around the corner of the case.

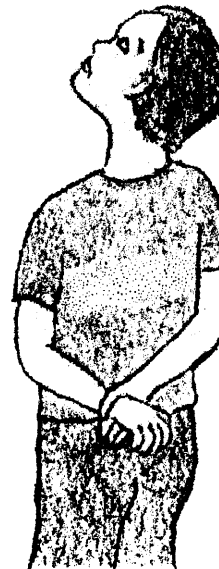
Miss Lewis was calling from the far end of the room, but before Murray turned to go, he took one last look in the case. The men were climbing one by one back into their picture.



The next few rooms were very quiet. The paintings mostly showed grown-up men and women who stared out over Murray's head.



He tried to say hello to one of them, but she narrowed her eyes and hissed, "Ssshhh!"



Murray decided to keep his mouth shut for a while.

But finally, Murray saw something he could not resist. It was a man made entirely out of metal.

Murray stepped up to the man and said,

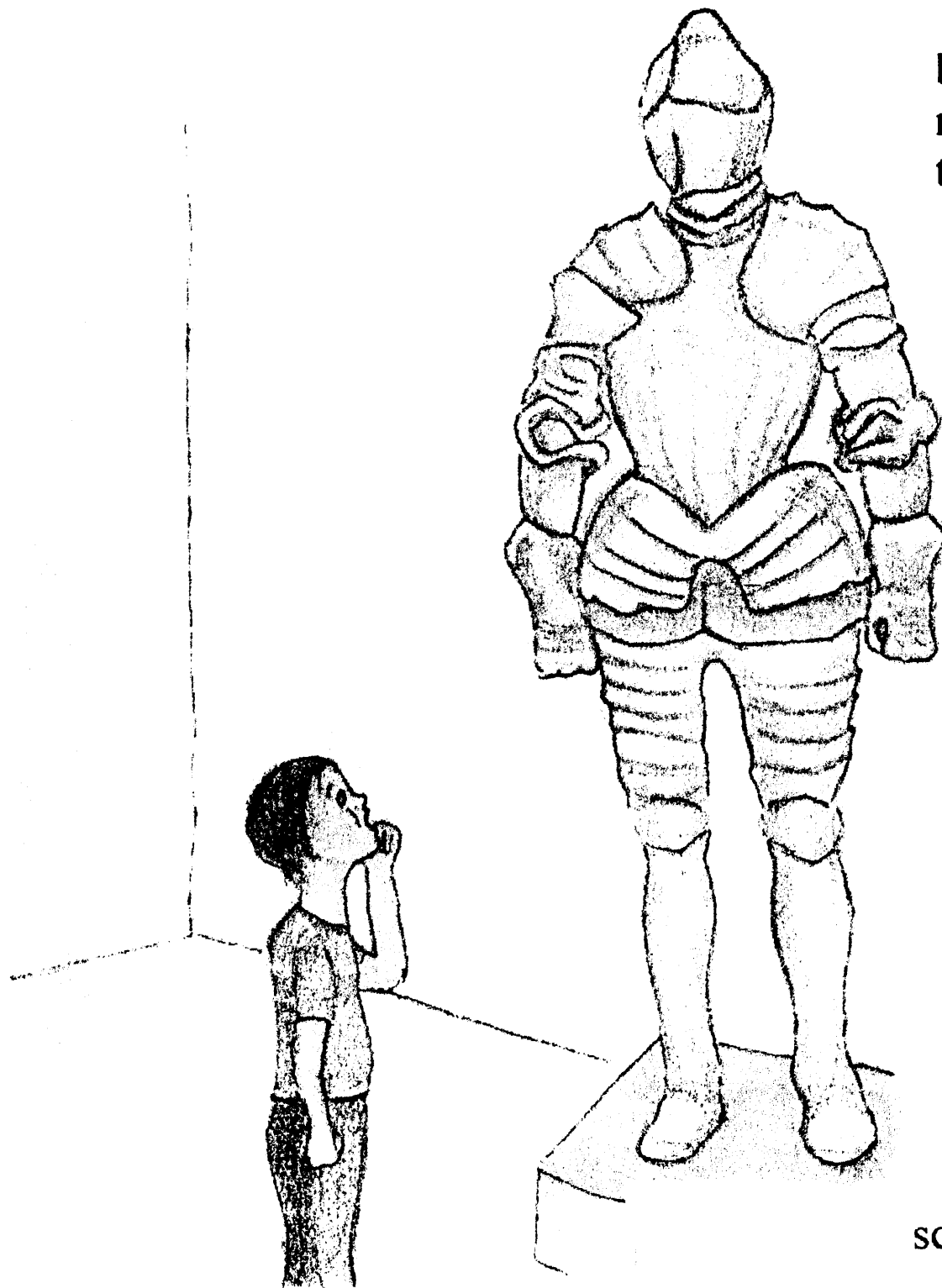
"Hello in there!"

The man's head turned sideways with a squeak.

"Who goes there?" boomed a deep voice.

"Murray," answered Murray.

"Why are you made out of metal?"



"I am a suit of armor. I belonged to a very courageous man named George Clifford," the voice said proudly.

"I never saw a metal suit before," said Murray.

"I am a special kind of suit, made for fighting battles," explained the voice.

"Do you fight many battles in here?" Murray asked with curiosity.

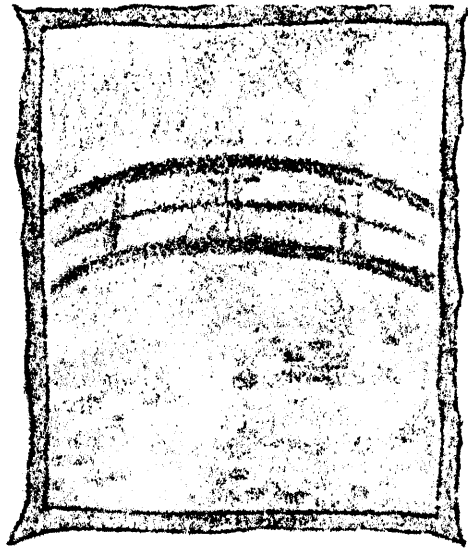
"Goodness, no!" exclaimed the voice.

"My battle days are over. I'm on permanent display."

"Well, it was nice to meet you," said Murray, "but I have to go now."

"Fare thee well," said the voice. "Tell others to come look at me."

"I will," Murray called as he scampered away.



Murray walked through many rooms before he saw another picture he wanted to explore. He spotted a painting of a wooded pond with a bridge curving over it. The water looked so green and glassy that he longed to touch it.

He squinted his eyes shut and when he opened them, he was standing on the bridge in the painting!

Murray stood on tiptoe and peered over the rail. The water was a long way down, too far to reach down and touch. But he wanted to do something.

Murray felt around inside his pocket and found a shiny penny. Stretching his arm out as far as he could, Murray dropped the penny. It fell with a splash into the water and disappeared below.

From far away, Murray could hear Miss Lewis calling, so he squinted his eyes shut again. When he opened them, he stood once again in front of the painting.



In the next room, Murray discovered a statue just his size. It was a girl in a frilly dress. Her eyes were closed and Murray wondered if she was taking a nap. He tiptoed up to her and, in a timid voice, said, "Hello?"

Startled, the statue opened her eyes.

"Who's there?" she whispered nervously.

"Don't be scared, I just wanted to say hello," said Murray.

"I'm not supposed to talk to anyone," the statue whispered back. "I'm not even supposed to move. They get mad if I do."

"I'm sorry," Murray said. "My mom gets mad, too, when I'm being noisy." The statue smiled a small smile. "I hate to be so mean, but they are terribly strict here. Especially for us dancers."

"So that's why you're wearing that funny dress and shoes," Murray said. The girl nodded.



"How old are you?" Murray asked.

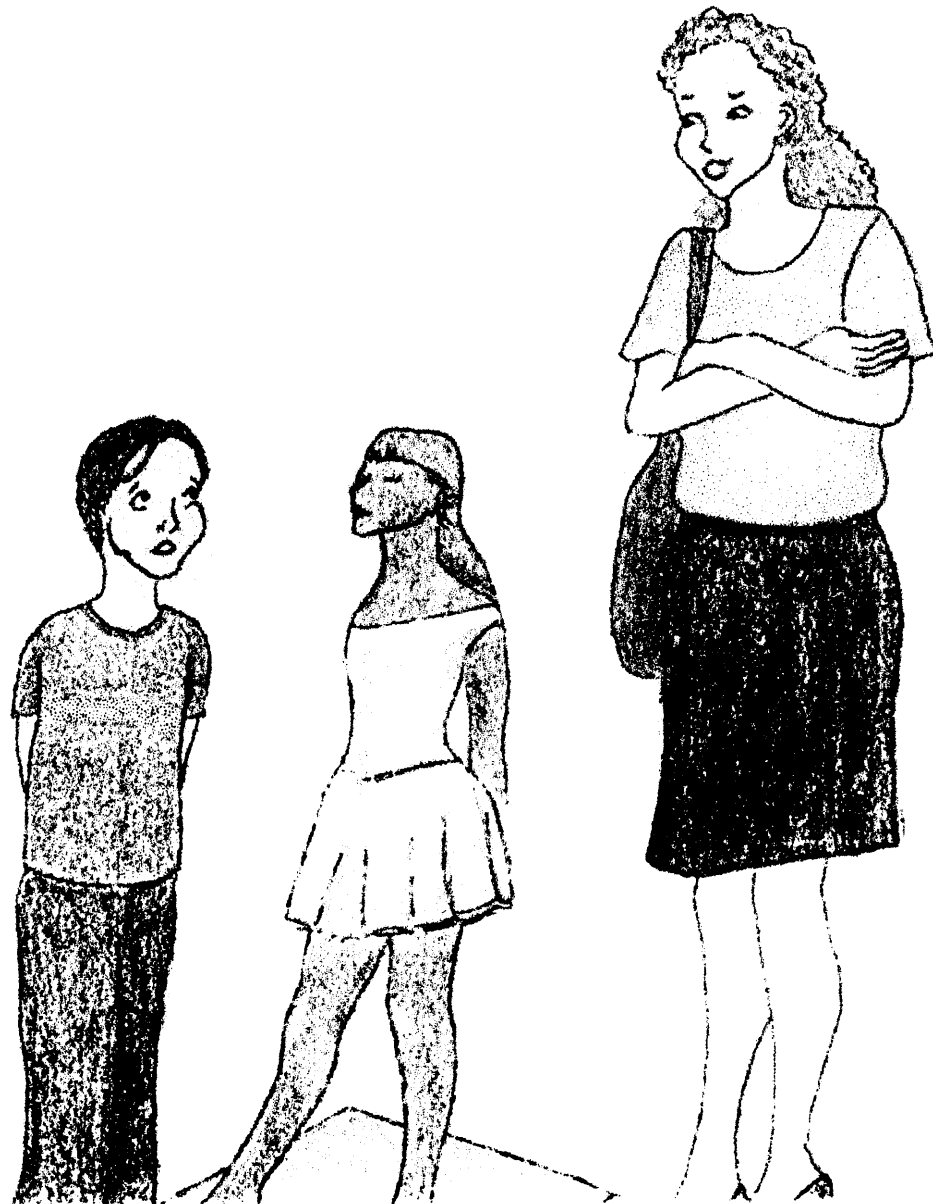
"Fourteen," she whispered, "But I've been in the museum for ages. How old are you?"

"Seven," he answered.

"Come back in another seven years and we'll be the same age," the statue suggested.

Murray nodded.

"It's a deal."



Just then, Miss Lewis appeared next to him.

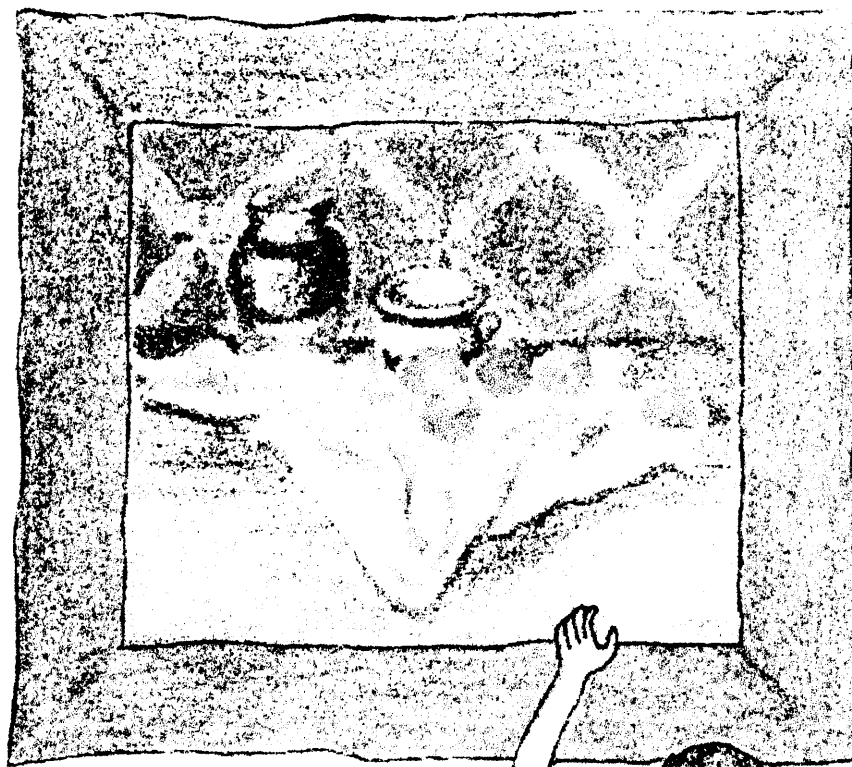
"Murray, dear, who are you talking to?" she asked.

Murray held his breath, but the statue was silent. Her mouth was shut so tight it looked like she had never opened it.

"I was just-just talking to myself," Murray stammered.

"Well, you'd better catch up with the rest of the class," Miss Lewis said.

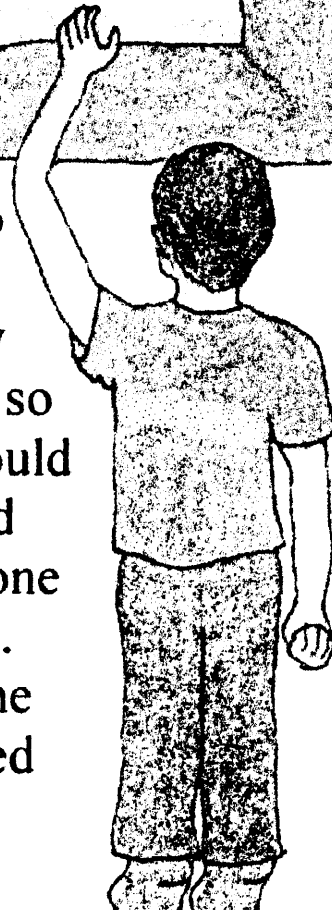
Murray hung his head and followed her out of the room.



Murray stood next to the painting and stared up at the sweet, yellow peaches. They looked so tasty, surely no one would mind... Murray glanced around the room. No one seemed to be watching.

As fast as he could, he reached up and snatched one of the peaches.

It was soft and fuzzy.



In the next room were still more paintings. Murray was getting tired of looking at so many pictures. He was also getting hungry.

Suddenly, his eyes landed on a painting of five peaches. Why would anyone ever paint a picture of fruit just sitting on a table? But then he walked closer, and he could smell something very sweet.

Murray took a big bite out of it. Delicious!

He ate the rest quickly, and then glanced back up at the painting. The very peach he had just eaten was sitting in the picture again!

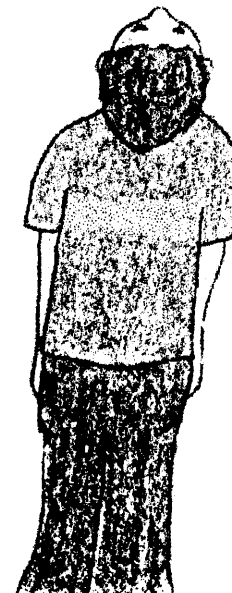
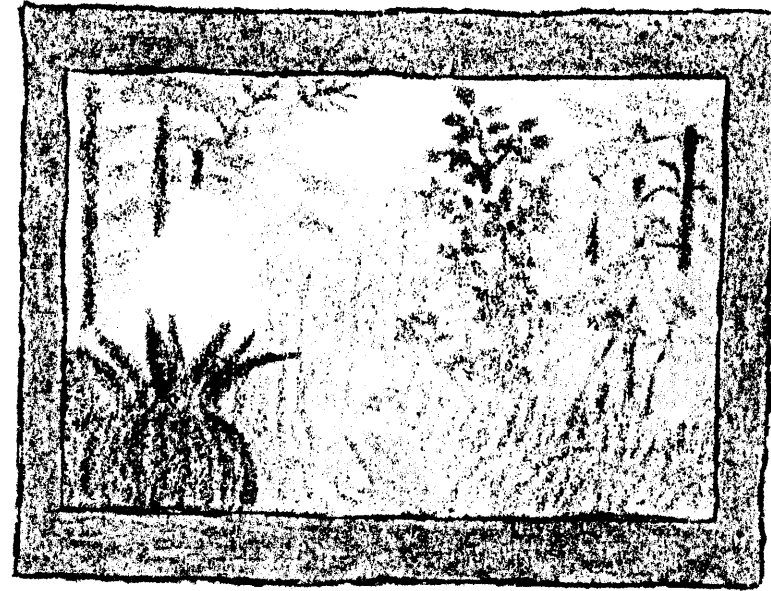
Satisfied, Murray crept away to find more paintings with food in them.



The next thing Murray found was not actually human food. He heard the licking of jaws and the smacking of lips and knew that someone was getting ready to eat. The sound was coming from one painting in particular.

Murray walked cautiously up to it and stared at the jungle trees and flowers. He could see brown fur and knew it belonged to some sort of animal, but he could not tell what animal it was.

Remembering the trick he had pulled with the painting of the pond, Murray shut his eyes tightly and blinked them open.



All around him, Murray felt leaves brushing against his arms and legs. Gigantic blue flowers loomed above him, and he could hear a rustling in the grass in front of him.

He lifted his hands and quietly parted the branches. Peering out, he saw a mass of fur sitting right in front of him. Murray gasped, and the animal turned at the noise.

Suddenly, Murray knew exactly what kind of animal it was. He was staring into the face of a full-grown lion! Blood dripped from its mouth, and Murray saw a piece of meat in its massive paws.

The lion began growling softly as it stood up on all fours. Murray realized with horror that if he didn't get away soon, he would be the lion's dessert.

He thought maybe he should run, but then he remembered he was inside a painting!

Desperately, Murray tried to remember how he'd gotten out of the other painting.

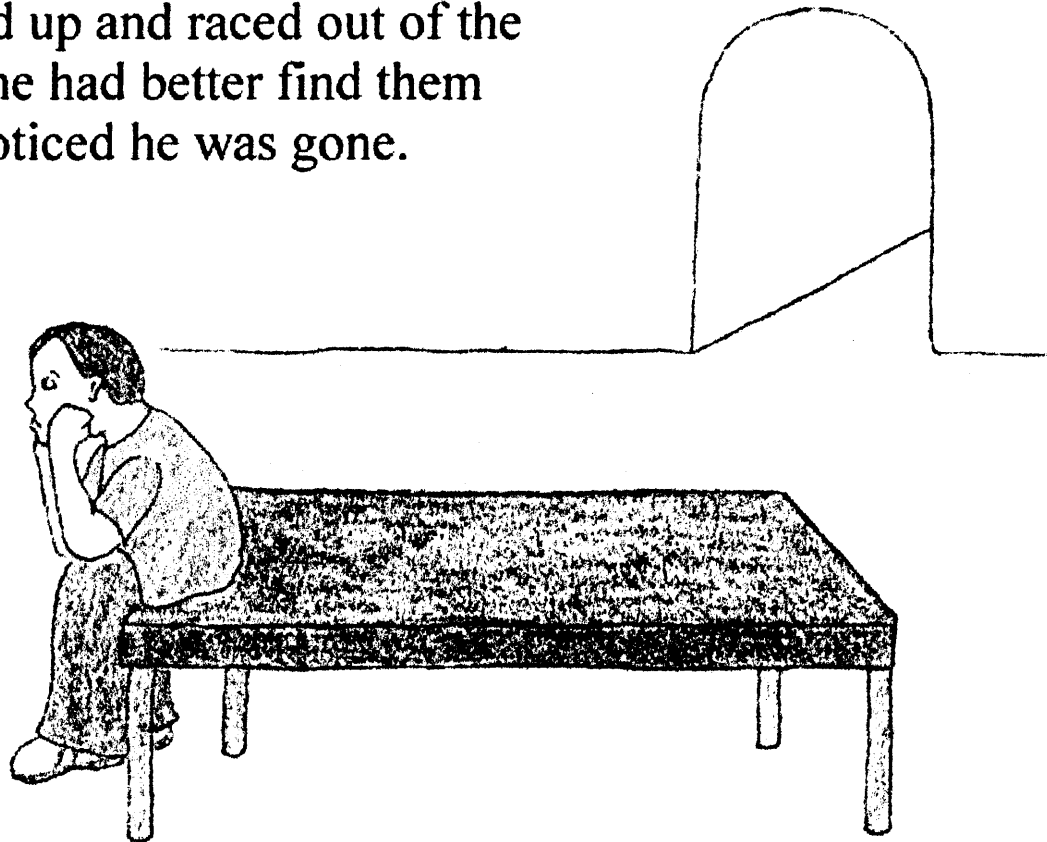
Just as the lion pounced, he squeezed his eyes shut and hoped with all his might that the trick would work again.



Murray expected to feel the lion's jaws clamp down on him. When they didn't, he opened his eyes. He was standing in front of the painting again. With relief, Murray looked at the lion. Still growling, it had settled down in the grass and picked up its piece of meat. Murray's heart was thumping, so he took a deep breath and sat down on a nearby bench. Not every painting in this place is safe, he thought. He would have to start being more careful.

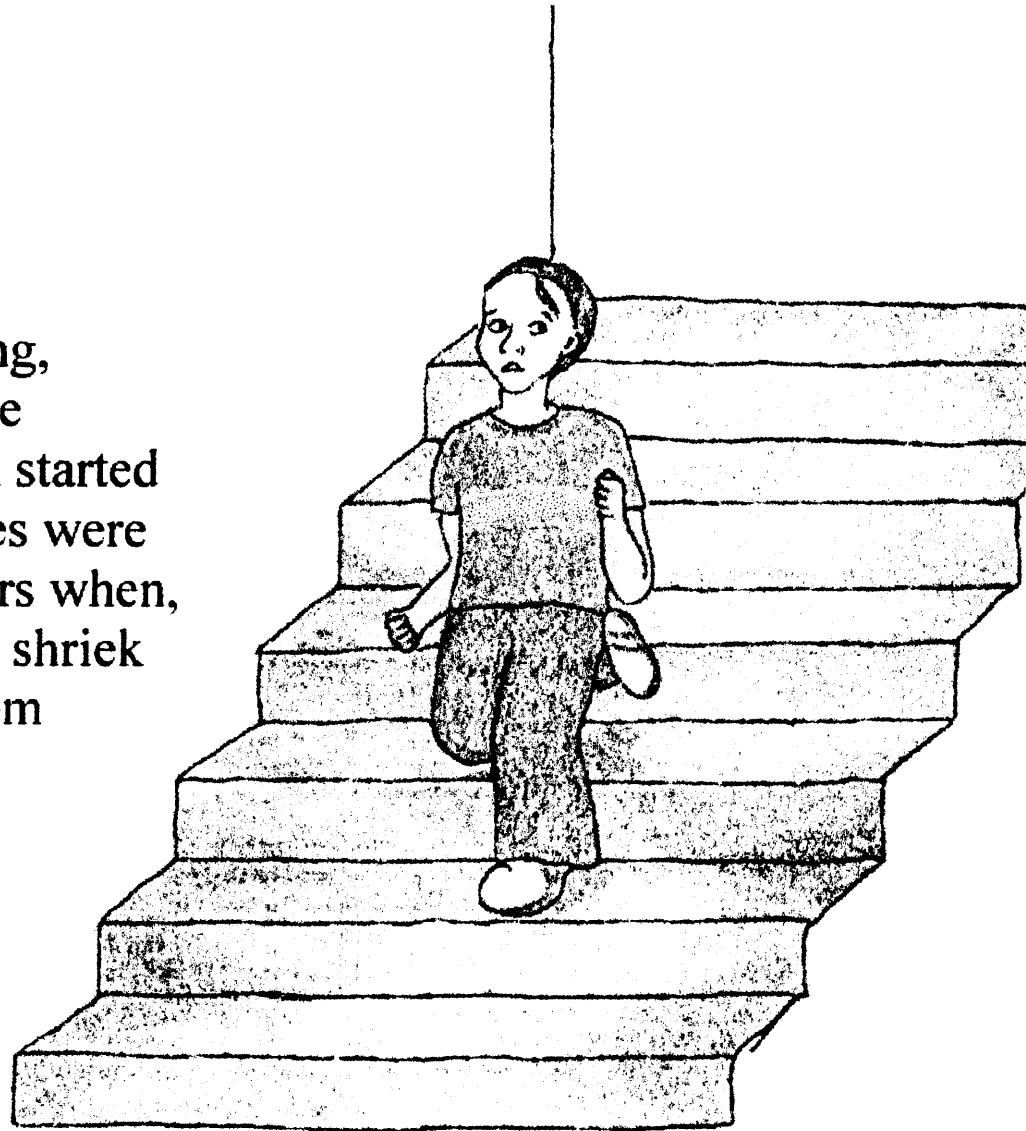
As Murray sat, catching his breath, he realized he was the only child in the room. In fact, he was the only person in the room. He listened hard but could not hear Miss Lewis or his classmates.

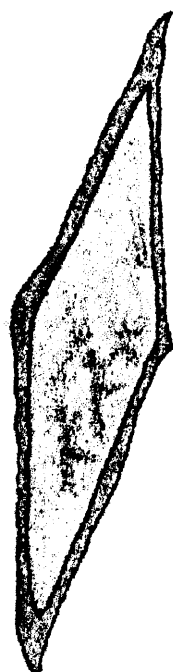
Murray jumped up and raced out of the room. He knew he had better find them before anyone noticed he was gone.



Murray ran from room to room, up and down ramps and staircases until he was completely mixed up. He listened and looked every which way but there was no sign of his class.

With a sinking feeling, Murray realized that he was lost. His stomach started to flip-flop and his eyes were getting blurry with tears when, suddenly, he heard the shriek of children coming from somewhere nearby.





He raced into the room to find it empty, all except for the voices. Murray followed the sounds and they led him to a painting on the far wall.

The picture showed a group of boys barely older than him. They were running through a field, holding hands, playing some sort of game. The sun shone down through big, white clouds onto their faces and bare feet.

They were having so much fun that Murray forgot all about being lost and could only think of joining the game.

Before he knew it, he had blinked himself into the picture.

One of the boys spotted him and shouted,
"Hey, junior! Wanna play Snap the Whip?"
"He looks a little small," called another boy.
Murray straightened up. "I'm seven, and I'm strong,"
he said proudly.
"Well, come on, then," invited the first boy. They broke
their chain and made room for Murray, who grabbed hands
with the boys on both sides of him.
"Ready? SNAP!" shouted one of the boys.
Murray felt himself pulled in two directions at once. He
hung on with all of his strength. Down at the end of the
chain one boy fell loose. The others cheered and kept on
with the game. Murray cheered, too.



This was the most fun he'd had all day! They played and played until Murray was tired and damp with sweat. The other boys didn't seem tired at all. They didn't even stop to rest.

Murray knew he should go soon. There had been something he was looking for but he couldn't quite remember... His class! He blinked himself down out of the painting without even saying goodbye.



Murray ran through still more rooms. He had played with those boys for hours!

He only hoped Miss Lewis realized he was missing and wouldn't leave without him.

Murray ran through the room with the dancer statue, past the painting of the pond, and into the room with the glass cases of vases and jars.

He looked at a case as he ran and saw the five tiny men running their laps alongside him.

Murray ran and ran until he found himself back where he had started the whole adventure, in the room with the wooden woman statue.

He ran right up to her and panted, "Please, have you seen my class anywhere?"

The statue blinked at him. "Why, hello again," she said.

"Hi," Murray replied hastily. "Have you seen my class? I got lost, and I've been gone for hours, and--"

"Do not worry," the statue said. "They are just now putting on their coats to leave."

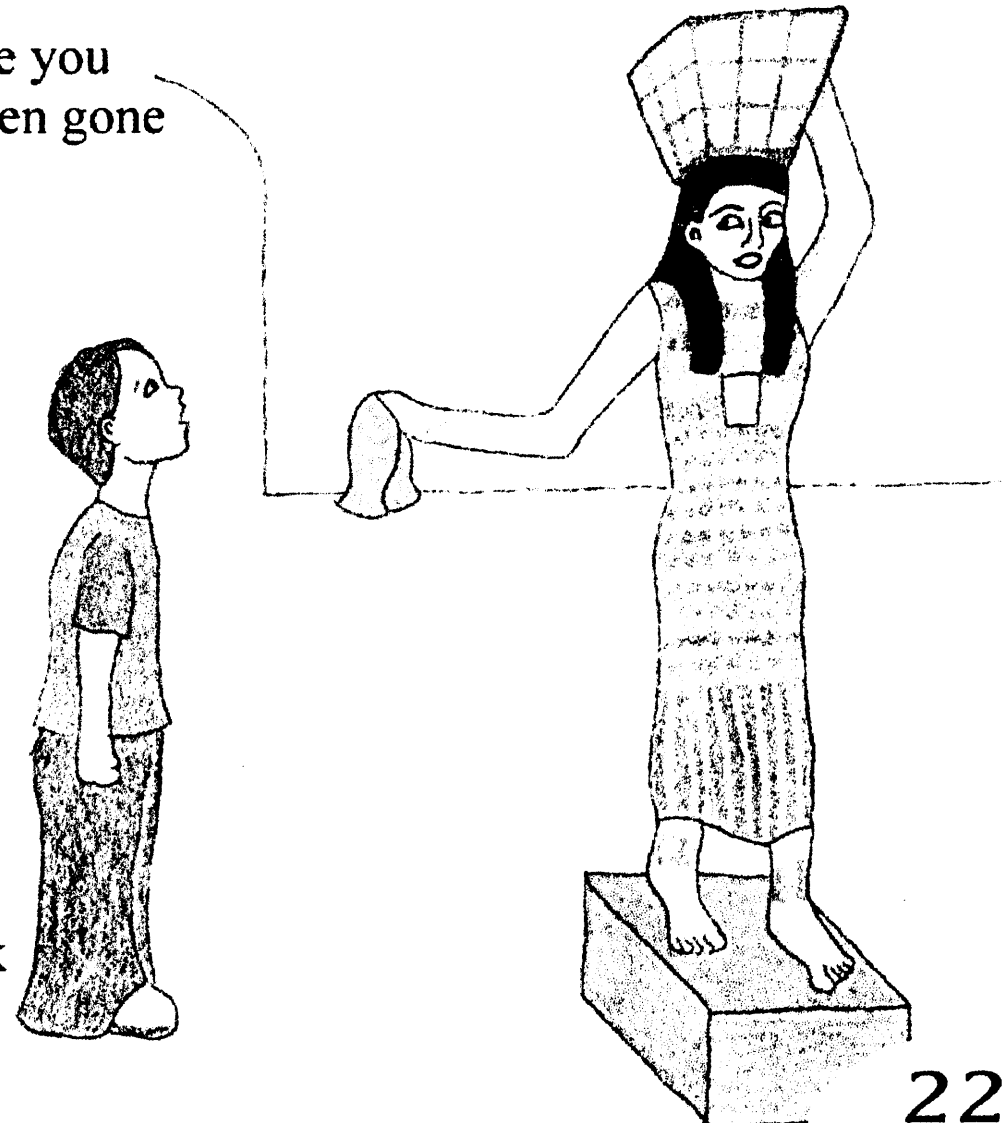
"Thank you," Murray said. He felt so relieved.

As he turned to go, the statue asked, "Did you find anything interesting?"

Murray turned back to her and nodded. "I sure did, but you should warn people about wild animals!"

The statue laughed. "I suppose so. Well, goodbye, little boy. Come back again sometime."

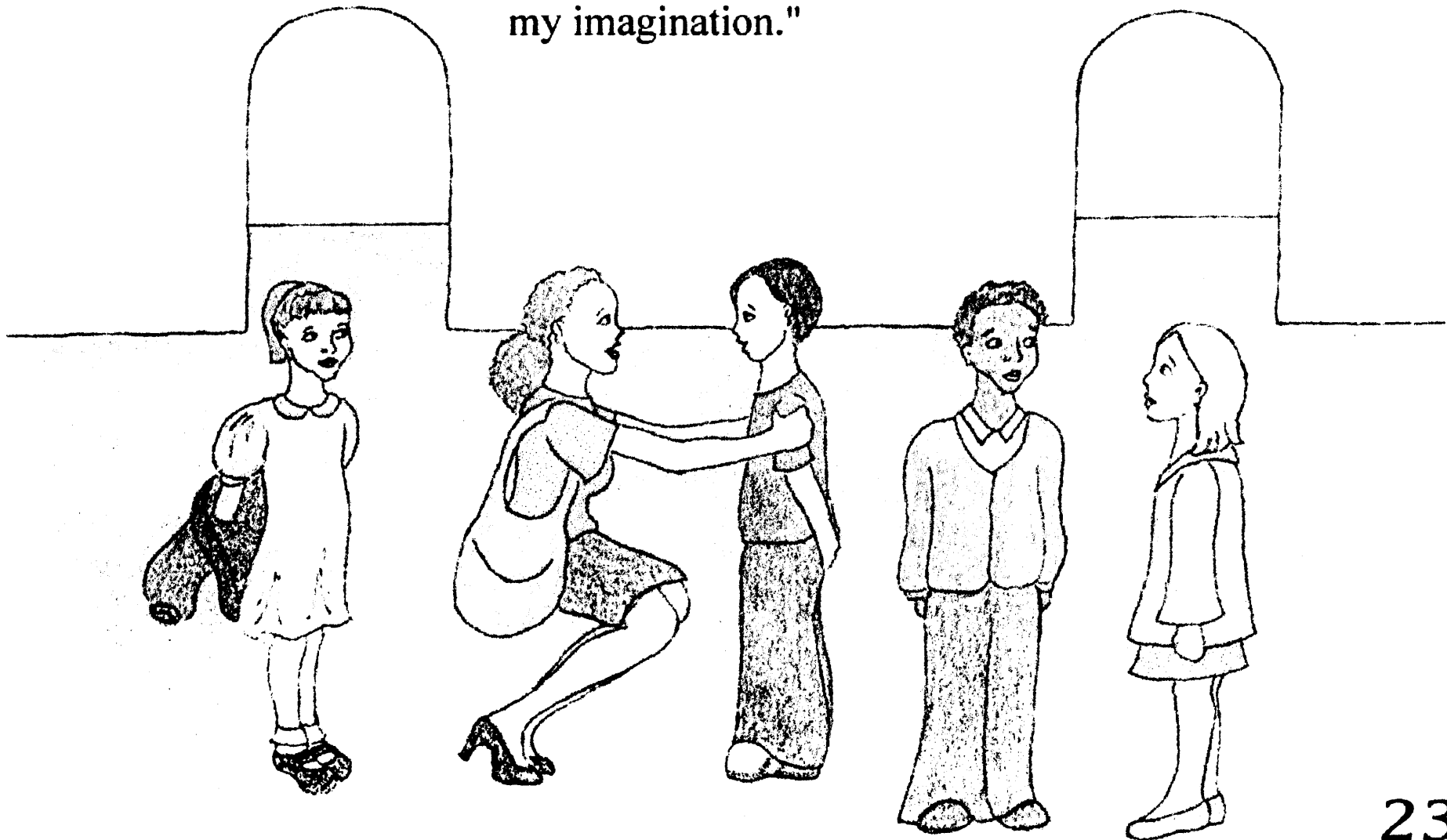
"Okay," Murray agreed.



As he walked back out into the lobby, Murray saw Miss Lewis looking out over the heads of all the girls and boys in his class. When she saw him, her face broke into a smile.

"Murray," she exclaimed, "Where have you been? When I didn't see you here I was scared to death you had gotten lost."

Murray opened his mouth to explain all about the lion and the game of Snap the Whip, but then he changed his mind. It was, after all, a secret he had promised to keep. So instead, he simply said, "I was just busy using my imagination."



THE END

